

Tell Me A Story

Subject: Language Arts

Duration: 1 hour

Location: Classroom / Outdoors

Key Vocabulary: Seminole, oral tradition

Related Activities: Designs of My World

Florida Sunshine State Standards: LA.D.2.2



Objectives. The students will analyze the importance of oral tradition.

Method. Students will listen to a Seminole story and discuss the development and importance of storytelling.

Background. Native Peoples use oral tradition as a way to explain the world around them. Before the tools of science appeared, the Seminoles used their five senses as tools of discovery. What grew out of those discoveries were stories. These stories taught the tribe how animals got their colors, seasonal changes, and morals. Storytelling is a tradition of unity to insure tribal beliefs. Discuss with students that oral tradition means that the tribes did not write down their stories. The first written record of native peoples is from the Europeans in the 1400s. See the “Natural History” and the “Resources” sections for more information on the Seminole.

Materials

- Blackline master “How Things Came to Be” from the book *Legends of the Seminoles* copyright (c)1994 by Betty Mae Jumper and Peter B. Gallagher. Used by permission of Pineapple Press, Inc.
- Pieces of paper
- Pencils

Suggested Procedure

1. Arrange the students in a circle and read “How things Came to Be.” Native Peoples believe that the circle keeps positive spirits in and distractions out. Discuss how the Miccosukee and other native peoples used stories to explain their world.
2. Have the students create their own stories on some aspect of nature that they can see. The only tools they have to work with are their five senses, a pencil, and a piece of paper.
3. Form a circle and have the students tell their stories.

Evaluation

Discuss how the Seminole and other native peoples used and still use, stories to explain their world. There is no right or wrong way to a story. How do we today explain our environment? Do we use oral tradition?

Extension

As a class, create a story about what the class has learned and what special activities the class did. Arrange the students in a circle and have each student add an element to the story. You have created your own creation story of “How Your Class Came To Be.”



How Things Came To Be*

When the Creator, the Grandfather of all things, had finished creating the earth, there were many things he wanted to put there. Birds, animals, reptiles, insects, many different living things.

The Creator did have certain favorite animals. He particularly liked the Panther, Coo-wah-chobee - crawls on four legs, close to the ground. The Panther would sit beside the Creator and He would pet the Panther, over and over, across its long, soft furry back.

The Creator made sure that certain animals and plants possessed unique healing powers. When the Creator touches certain things longer than normal, His powers automatically go into what He touches. He told the Panther, "When everything is complete, I would like for you to be first to walk on the earth. You are majestic and beautiful. You have patience and strength. There is something special about you. You are the perfect one to walk the earth first."

Creator went to work making all sorts of animals and birds. Animals on all fours, animals with hooves, animals with paws, birds with claws, insects, reptiles - why, there was nothing the Creator left out.

When the earth was ready, Creator put all the animals in a large shell. Or something round. He set it along the backbone of the earth - the real high mountains. "When the timing is right," he told the animals, "the shell will open and you will all crawl out. Someone or something will crack the shell and you must all take your respective places on the face of the earth." The creator then sealed up the shell and left, hoping the Panther would be first to come out.

Time went along, and nothing happened. Alongside the shell stood a great tree. As time passed, the tree grew so large that its roots started encircling the shell. Eventually a root cracked the shell. The Panther was patient, which the Creator liked. But, at this particular time, Panther was too patient. The Wind started circling around the cracked shell, round and round the inside, so vigorously that the crack was made larger.

The Wind, however, remembered that the Creator wished for the Panther to be on the earth first. "We will fulfill the Creator's wishes," said the Wind, reaching down to help the Panther take its place on earth.

The Wind was everywhere. The Wind was the air we breathe. After Wind helped the Panther out first, the Panther thanked Wind for the honor.

Next to crawl out was the Bird. The Bird had picked and picked around the hole, and, when the time was right, stepped outside the shell. Bird took flight immediately.

After that, other animals emerged in different sequences. Bear, Deer, Snake, Frog, Otter. There were thousands of others, so many that no one besides the Creator could even begin to count them all. All went out to seek their proper places on the earth.

Meanwhile, as the Bird was flying around looking for a place to live on earth, the Creator was watching. He watched each animal and did not intervene, but left the animals on their own. The Creator often allows things to happen along their own sequences. Sometimes a thing must happen on its own merits.

When the Creator saw that all was done, He decided to name the animals and put them in clans.

For being such a good companion, the Creator rewarded the Panther with special qualities: “Your clan will have the knowledge for making laws and for making the medicine which heals,” Creator told Panther. “You, the Panther, will be in possession of all knowledge of different herbs. The Panther will have the power to heal different ailments and to enhance mental powers.”

Creator believed the actions of the Wind were very honorable and noble, so He told the Wind: “You will serve all living things so they may breathe. Without the wind- or air- all will die.”

“From this day forth, Wind will be brother to the Panther and all living things. When the Panther is making official medicine, the wind must be there, beside the Panther, no more than a few paces away from the Panther at all times.”

The Bird, for being able to take flight, will be ruler of the earth, said the Creator: “The Bird will make sure that all things are put in their proper places on earth.”



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